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DEPARTMENT OF STATE FR 896.1

Memorandum of Conversation

DATE: December 1, 1958

SUBJECT: Berlin Situation

PARTICIPANTS: M. Charles Lucet, Minister, French Embassy
M. Olivier Manet, Counselor, French Embassy
EUR - Mr. Kohler
GER - Mr. Lampson

COPIES TO: S/S
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M. Lucet reported that his Government agreed to the holding of discussions on the Berlin situation in Bonn in which the three Western ambassadors and Foreign Minister von Brentano would take part. They also were in favor of discussions in Washington by experts of the Three Powers to prepare for the December 15 meeting of the Foreign Ministers in Paris. His Government was opposed to the British suggestion that a meeting of the four Western Foreign Ministers should be held at once. His Government, however, would like to have a working group convene on the eighth of December to do some preparatory work on an answer to the Soviet Note.

In reply Mr. Kohler said that we agreed fully with the French that a meeting of the Four Foreign Ministers should not be held immediately. He added, however, that we had not heard a word officially on the subject from the British and he wondered whether the press stories on the subject were correct.

Mr. Kohler then said that the situation was not quite as urgent as it had seemed before the delivery of the Soviet Note. Nevertheless there was much to be done. The contingency papers needed review, especially the paper regarding dealing with the East Germans. We have prepared a directive on this subject which is now being considered in the Pentagon. As soon as they have approved it we will want to discuss it with the French and British. It is designed to give general guidance for a review of the contingency plans for Berlin but will leave it up to the Embassies in Bonn to review the plans in detail in the light of the general guidance and recommend amendments to governments. We believe that the agency theory which lies behind the previous contingency plan is no longer applicable since the Soviets have explicitly denied that the GDR authorities are their agents.

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The need for a review has been made clear by the latest Soviet Note.

M. Lucet and Mr. Kohler agreed that the question of how to handle GDR notes should also be discussed in Bonn.

Mr. Kohler then brought up the question of what method should be adopted for working out an answer to the Soviet Note. He pointed out that the Secretary would not be back in this country until December 5. Although we were willing to begin discussions in Washington in the next few days concerning the Soviet Note and possible lines of responding to it we would not be in a position to take anything but tentative positions until the Secretary had a chance to take part in the departmental deliberations. It might be possible to draft some kind of preliminary paper for submission to the Secretary on his return but the Department would not be ready to take part in a tripartite Working Group meeting on the 8th of December. However, the Secretary and Mr. Merchant would be in Paris on December 13 and it might be possible to hold a meeting on December 14 at the Merchant level to prepare for the meeting of the Foreign Ministers scheduled for the 15th.

M. Lucet then summarized some of the preliminary reactions of the Quai d'Orsay to the Soviet Note. The Quai felt that the gross distortion of history contained in the Note was very injurious and that it would be necessary to answer it in detail. This answer should not be included in the text of the reply itself but might be contained in an annex.

Mr. Kohler said that we agreed thoroughly. We were in the process of preparing a sort of white paper or pamphlet which could be given the widest distribution. The errors in the Note gave us an unusual opportunity for attack. We were planning to prepare a report in three columns. The first column would contain the assertion contained in the Note, the second column the Soviet statement at the time of the event, the third the facts.

M. Lucet then said that the French could not accept the idea of West Berlin as a free city. Moreover, the tone of ultimatum in the Note was in itself unacceptable. The Quai thought the proposals made were dangerous because they led in the direction of recognition of the GDR and might give impetus to the Rapacki Plan again. Lastly, the French considered Berlin a part of the whole German problem which should not be dealt with in isolation.

Mr. Kohler said that the French analysis was very similar to our line of thought.

At the close of the conversation M. Lucet asked what we could do if we refused to deal with East Germans. Mr. Kohler replied that there were only two choices. We could accept a self-imposed surface blockade and resort to an air-lift or we could attempt to push through by force by using armed escorts. M. Lucet concluded that these were questions which would have to be settled on the ministerial level.

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